

36 Young CO's Shoulder Shovels in Camp to Satisfy Consciences

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(Of The Bulletin Staff)

Elk Ridge, Md., May 16.—There are a lot of countries where this couldn't happen:

In tar-paper barracks deep in Patapsco State Park—just 15 minutes by automobile from Fort Meade—36 young men of draft age tumbled out of Army cots at 5.30 A. M. today, pulled on heavy overalls and work boots, and ate a hasty breakfast from Army crockery.

An hour later, just as other young men at Fort Meade were shouldering guns to drill for war, the 36 at Patapsco tried a different plan. In a rude meeting room they gathered to spend a half-hour in prayers for peace. Then they went out to work for it—with spades, wheelbarrows, hammers and pickaxes.

And so began an experiment in freedom—American variety.

The 36 who mixed prayers with spadework came from Philadelphia, Camden, and a score of other cities and towns in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware and Maryland. All are conscientious objectors to war service.

A Year of Manual Labor

Today they are beginning a full year of manual labor; and in doing so, making a little history.

They are the first conscientious objectors in the history of America to report for "work of national importance" under a draft law which recognizes their scruples against war. And the camp that swings into action today, a civilian camp operated by the American Friends Service Committee, is the first of its kind.

As pioneers, the 36 "C. O.'s" who are opening the camp were assured this morning that this will not be an easy year.

"We have prepared a schedule," said Dr. Ernest A. Wildman, Indiana college professor and camp director, "which approximates the Army routine.

"There will be eight hours of hard work, five days a week. In addition, we'll expect each boy to devote most of his evenings to study—languages, sociological or technical studies."

A Rigid Schedule

They will work at a variety of tasks in the Patapsco park—planting trees, building roads, draining a swamp.

The schedule is rigid: Rise at 5.30; breakfast at 6; group meditation at 6.30; work from 7 to 4; recreation, study and camp duty from 6.30 to "lights out" at 9.30.

In other respects, too, the conscientious objectors were learning today that there is not much difference—save in the important matters of conscience—between Army camp and work camp.

Their home, for a year, will be a group of four abandoned CCC barracks, hastily renovated and still lacking stoves. Their cots are standard Army cots, and they are the only furniture in their sleeping halls. If they want more, they'll have to make it.

Their group represented 17 faiths—Friends, Mennonites, Methodists, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of the Brethren, Presbyterians, Christiansadelphians and many minor groups—and Bibles, tracts and serious works of history and economics were stacked up in the rude cupboards

above their cots.

As pioneers, these first representatives of 1,067 conscientious objectors in the United States, who will be established by July in this and 21 other camps throughout the country, are notably serious-minded.

Among the 36 are every shade of feeling, from those whose position is based firmly on religious tenets to those whose scruples are rooted in sober logic.

Hope for Reconstruction Work

Many of them hope for a chance to do more than mere tree-planting, to prove their sincerity.

"A lot of us," says Carroll O'Neill, Baltimore mathematics teacher, "hope that we will be given an opportunity to go abroad—during the war or after—to do reconstruction work. The Friends work without regard to nationality, and we would gladly go anywhere—England, Poland, France or Germany—to repair the damage or relieve suffering."

They would prefer, he says, to do it while the bombs are still falling—partly to get an early start on the work of reconstruction, partly to "show" those who question the sincerity of the objectors' motives.

And he points to a precedent. In the last war, 503 conscientious objectors were imprisoned in Leavenworth—there were no such camps as Patapsco then—but many were released to work with the Friends in rebuilding homes in Europe while the war still raged.

Financially, conscience is a costly luxury for the men at this new-type camp.

Assigned to the work-camps by their local draft boards, the men remain under control of the Selective Service organization. But they don't get the selectees' \$21 a month.

Men Pay \$35 a Month

On the contrary, they pay \$35 a month apiece to the agencies operating the camp, out of which \$2.50 a month is returned to them for spending money. So most of them have given up cigarettes.

Those who cannot afford to pay their own way are supported, in many cases, by local churches or peace organizations.

But those who have no such sponsorship are still able to maintain their conscience. The three groups which are setting up the camps—the American Friends' Service Committee, the Church of the Brethren and the Mennonites—have agreed with the Selective Service organization to defray the expenses for any conscientious objector who cannot raise the funds himself. The cost will be divided equally by the three agencies.

The Patapsco camp, expected to accommodate 125 youths when the program is complete, will have a staff of five. Dr. Wildman's wife, Edith Edwards Wildman, a native of Haverford, will serve as hostess.

Nancy Wales Foster, as dietitian, will supervise the kitchen, but all the work will be done by the boys. Roger Colcott Drury, former editor of a New York publishing firm, will be assistant director. An infirmary will be in charge of Alice Worcester Beaman, a nurse, formerly of Philadelphia.